

Byzantine Liturgy

Report on the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium of 1979

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THE choice of a broad subject such as "The Liturgy" for the Symposium of 1979 presented the obvious risk of encouraging generalization at the expense of analytic research. However, equally general topics adopted for previous Symposia (e.g., "Byzantine Society" in 1969) have also shown the possibility of drawing together the representatives of different disciplines around a subject which concerned them all, and thus producing an interesting and fruitful cross-fertilization of concerns and interests.

The program of this Symposium gathered together a remarkable group of specialists in history, theology, art, music, literature, and architecture. It included the following papers:

John Meyendorff (Fordham University and St. Vladimir's Seminary):

"Introduction: The Liturgy — a Neglected Lead to the Mind of Byzantium"

Robert Van Nice (Dumbarton Oaks):

"St. Sophia: Accomodating the Liturgy to Unusual Plan Arrangements, Unprecedented Size, and Preexisting Buildings"

George Majeska (University of Maryland):

"St. Sophia and the Liturgy of Imperial Coronation"

Cyril Mango (Oxford University):

"The Liturgy and the People"

Dimitri Conomos (University of British Columbia):

"Change in Early Christian and Byzantine Liturgical Chant"

Robert Taft (University of Notre Dame and Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome):

"The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation in the Period Following Iconoclasm"

Alexander Schmemmann (St. Vladimir's Seminary):

"Symbols and Symbolism in the Byzantine Liturgy"

José Grosdidier de Matons (La Sorbonne, Paris):

"Liturgie et Hymnographie: Kontakion et Canon"

Gabrielle Winkler (St. John's, Collegeville, Minn.):

"The Problem of the Origins and Evolution of Epiphany and its Relation to Nativity: An Investigation of Armenian and Other Oriental Sources"

Anthony Cutler (Pennsylvania State University):

"Liturgical Strata in the Marginal Psalters"

Hans Belting (Heidelberg):

"The Portrait-Icon of the Buried Christ: A Problem from the History of Art and Liturgy"

The present Report will not attempt to analyze all the papers given at the Symposium: their publication, either in this volume of the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* or elsewhere, will assure that the points made by the authors will reach the appropriate audience. However, it is important to note that the goal pursued by the organizers—to provoke interdisciplinary discussion—was achieved, and that several illuminating and occasionally brilliant debates took place on the floor.

The evidence produced by Robert Van Nice concerning the architecture of St. Sophia challenged some accepted views, produced on the basis of conjectural interpretation of texts, which are not corroborated by the structure of the famous building. One hopes that the monumental architectural survey prepared by Van Nice will soon be completed in print, for it will undoubtedly provide many of the facts needed for the interpretation of the existent written information on many events of Byzantine history (such as those discussed by George Majeska in his paper), and, indeed, on the liturgy.

Several of the papers examined the development which, between the fourth century and the early medieval period, led the Byzantine liturgy to become more esoteric, less and less to involve direct participation by the people, and to emphasize the "mysterious" elements of Christian worship. This evolution is shown not only in the architectural history of the *ambo* and the development of a screen separating the sanctuary from the nave (Mango; Taft [*supra*, pp. 45–75]), but also in the history of hymnography, as the old *Kontakion*, which involved popular participation, was replaced in the seventh and eighth centuries by the much more sophisticated system of *canons* (Grosdidier de Matons [*supra*, pp. 31–43]).

These developments had necessarily to be accompanied by changes in popular piety and

popular interpretation of the Liturgy. This appears not only in the history of Byzantine music—which unfortunately can be deciphered and therefore studied only for the later period (Conomos)—but particularly in the growth of symbolism as the normal means of communicating the meaning of liturgical actions. Thus, the symbolic interpretation of the eucharistic liturgy, as expressed by Patriarch Germanos in the early eighth century, became standard in medieval Byzantium, influencing later liturgical, artistic, and theological thinking (Taft [*loc. cit.*]). The theological legitimacy of such a development can be challenged, and some tend to consider it a sign of liturgical decadence (Schmemmann). A lively debate between speakers adopting different methodological perspectives took place during the Symposium on this subject.

The relationship between liturgy and theology was also discussed in reference to the preservation in the Armenian church of the ancient tradition of a single feast of the Epiphany on January 6—the absence of the Nativity Feast on December 25 was interpreted as a sign of a "lower" ("adoptionist") Christology (Winkler). Finally, art historians analyzed the liturgical origin of marginal illustration of Psalters (Cutler [*supra*, pp. 17–30]) and the iconography of the dead Christ—i.e., the late development of what is to be interpreted as the icon of Good Friday (Belting [*supra*, pp. 1–16]).

Inevitably, each discussion served primarily to point out problems of Byzantine civilization which cannot be solved without further study of the liturgy. Most participants considered that the interdisciplinary contacts were productive and stimulating, and that a new awareness among Byzantinists of the liturgy as a major guide to the mind of Byzantium is to be welcomed as a positive development in the field of Byzantine studies.